

# Members advance new House lines

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After two days of debate and negotiations, the Louisiana House late Tuesday approved a plan for redrawing the chamber's 105 election districts to reflect population shifts since the 2000 U.S. census.

The House voted 70-28 for the plan, House Bill 1, sponsored by House Speaker Jim Tucker, R-Terrytown.

The 28 "no" votes largely came from black Democratic lawmakers and Jefferson Parish Republican representatives.

Both groups claimed their communities' interests were not served well by the plan.

The plan provides for three new districts in the Baton Rouge area, including a majority black district. HB1 now moves to the state Senate for consideration.

House approval came amid warnings that the plan fell short of meeting federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 requirements

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that safeguard against dilution of minority voting influence.

That will cause the U.S. Justice Department to reject the plan, opponents say.

Tucker countered that the HB1 remap complies with the Voting Rights Act.

It has "29 majority-minority districts — two more than are currently on the books," Tucker said. "We have done all we can in a process to insure that fair representation is available to the people of this state."

The potential problem centers around House elimination of a 30th majority black district in Shreveport, according to opponents.

The House redistricting committee had added the black majority district on a 10-9 vote last

week.

The move threw two Caddo Parish Republicans into the same district. Republican lawmakers, with Gov. Bobby Jindal's backing, got the House to reverse the change Monday.

That's not acceptable, said state Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, who chaired the House redistricting effort. He said the Justice Department likely would reject the plan on this issue alone.

Legislative Black Caucus Chairwoman state Rep. Patricia Smith, D-Baton Rouge, said a legal challenge would be filed.

"We will have to have a right plan put in place that does protect the districts of minority voters across Louisiana," Smith said. "Until we do, it won't pass pre-clearance (by Justice) or the muster of the court."

The House redistricting plan is the result of a federal requirement to realign election districts to reflect population shifts over the past decade. The election

districts must be fairly equal in population.

Prior to the vote, the House accepted a compromise crafted by a coalition of Republican and Democratic lawmakers from north central Louisiana that prevented two incumbents being put in the same district.

The agreement puts state Rep. Rick Nowlin, R-Natchitoches, in a new majority black district that does not have an incumbent.

Nowlin agreed to the change.

Nowlin said all he wanted out of remapping was for the city of Natchitoches, the Cane River and Northwestern State University to be in one district.

Nowlin said he will run for reelection this fall from the newly created district.

At various times Nowlin had been put in a district with a Democrat as well as a fellow Republican. Tucker had sought to pit two Democratic incumbents against each other.

The Louisiana House ended

debate on HB1 with a fight between legislators from Orleans and Jefferson parishes.

Jefferson lawmakers wanted to keep a sixth House district in the parish, as it is today. Orleans representatives objected.

The House rejected the change with 47 representatives voting "yes," while 48 voted "no."

**VOTING FOR HB1 PLAN TO REDRAW THE 105 HOUSE ELECTION DISTRICTS (70):**

Speaker Tucker and Reps. Abramson, Anders, Armes, Arnold, B. Badon, Baldone, Barras, Billiot, Burford, H. Burns, T. Burns, Carmody, Carter, Champagne, Chandler, Chaney, Cortez, Cromer, Danahay, Doerge, Downs, Ellington, Farnin, Foil, Geymann, Gisclair, Greene, Guillory, Guinn, Hazel, Henderson, Hill, Hines, Hoffmann, Howard, Hutter, Johnson, S. Jones, Katz, Kleckley, Lambert, Landry, LeBas, Leger, Little, Lorusso, McVea, Montoucet, Moreno, Morris, Norton, Nowlin, Pearson, Ponti, Pope, Pugh, Richardson, Ritchie, Robideaux, Roy, Schroder, Seabaugh, Simon, Smiley, J. Smith, St. Germain, Thibaut, White and Willmott.

**VOTING AGAINST HB1 (28):**

Reps. Aubert, A. Badon, Barrow, Bishop, Brossett, Burrell, Connick, Dixon, Edwards, Franklin, Gallot, Hardy, Henry, Honore, G. Jackson, M. Jackson, R. Jones, LaBruzze, LaFonta, Ligi, Lopinto, P. Smith, Stiaes, Talbot, Templet, Thierry, Williams, and Wooton.

**NOT VOTING (5):** Reps. Dove, Harrison, Monica, Richard and Smith, G.